

research snapshot

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Using the Internet to Help HIV Positive Youth



What is this research about?

There is an enormous number of young people living HIV around the world. These youth have access to very few resources and information for helping manage their disease. Despite a growing number of youth being diagnosed with HIV in Canada, the available resources fail to address the unique needs of these young people. There is a strong need for more resources on HIV/AIDS being presented in a youth-friendly format.

What did the researchers do?

The researcher used a community based model for this project. In this model, the youth being interviewed became co-researchers and helped design and collect the research. Thirty five HIV positive youth were asked about their internet use through interviews and surveys.

What you need to know:

The internet is a useful medium for assisting HIV positive youth. Youth need a dedicated website to access information, services, and social support to help manage their HIV.

What did the researchers find?

The researcher found that HIV positive youth rarely used the internet for accessing health information. Some of the barriers the youth faced to accessing health information were:

1. There was too much out there and it was hard to prioritize and figure out “what’s what”
2. Most information that was out there was unintelligible
3. They found the experience somewhat overwhelming

However, the youth were enthusiastic about using the internet to access health information if it was all featured on one web site. The youth mentioned four specific components they wanted on such a website:

1. Social support and communication opportunities
2. Information on HIV
3. Interactive components
4. Having their privacy protected

Researchers found that the most impoverished and marginalized youth actually used the internet quite regularly. This makes the use of an internet website a useful way to reach out to the most vulnerable HIV positive youth.

How can you use this research?

Policymakers, community groups, and service providers will find this research useful in designing more effective methods to reach out to HIV positive youth. The research points out the advantages of a “one stop shop” online approach that the youth find favourable.

About the Researcher

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